

## **Heritage and Peacebuilding**

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### **Dacia Viejo-Rose**

Heritage is increasingly appearing at the centre of discussions about peacebuilding. Yet heritage – whether understood as property or as a process of meaning making – has been undergoing a profound ontological transformation and the strategic environment of peacebuilding has been expanding to include more spheres of action. Marrying these two spheres is thus no easy task. In April 2015 UNESCO Director General, Irina Bokova, declared in a meeting of the UN Security Council: "Culture stands on the front-line of conflict - it should be at the front-line of peacebuilding." (UNESCO 2015) and in June 2016 EU High Representative for External Relations, Federica Mogherini, commented that "Promoting heritage is not for archaeologists only — it is a peace imperative" (UNESCO 2016). What is the vision of peacebuilding that heritage is meant to be instrumental in effecting? What is the understanding of heritage that is being called into action?

This edited volume goes some way towards addressing these questions. A brief introduction is followed by twenty chapters of which six are 'conversations' with key figures working towards peacebuilding through museum or heritage practice. From the start, the volume's editors state that its mission is to "'solutionise' heritage rather than 'problematise' it" (p.1); the most significant obstacle to this has been the reduction of heritage to a depoliticised universal denominator of belonging to and representing

'humanity' and therefore intrinsically peacebuilding at its core. The problem with this reduction is, as many critics have observed, that heritage being a complex phenomenon of praxis and meaning making with a deep stratigraphy of uses, abuses, interpretations and reinterpretations, has more frequently been used to demarcate difference, make claims of superiority, and justify violence of every kind. A critical approach to heritage is thus fundamental to finding ways of using it as a peacebuilding tool. The editors also make a call for 'bottom-up' heritage initiatives to peacebuilding and present the volume as a collection of such; they might have done more to acknowledge that museums are often instruments of 'top-down' heritage work, which therefor needs to be subverted. Happily, several of the chapter authors do address these issues head-on to great effect (see notably Bernadette Lynch's piece).

The chapters in the volume are divided into three sections around the themes of new ideas, practice, and sites respectively. The first section, "New and Emerging Ideas around Heritage and Peace", begins with a piece by Peter van den Dungen making the essential opening point that the number of museums and heritage sites dedicated to war far outnumber dedicated to peace. Of the latter he distinguishes between museums *about* peace, museums *for* peace, and heritage *of* peace, making a call for all of these to integrate peace education and peace history in order to contribute to a greater awareness of the heritage of peacemaking itself. This is followed by a 'conversation' with exhibition designer Seth Frankel about the practicalities of designing effective exhibitions aimed at peacebuilding. He argues for the need to define a 'central message that will serve to filter possible stories" (p. 20) and give clarity to the "interpretative 'lens'" (p. 20). A chapter by Diana Walters calling for internationalism in the peacebuilding actions of thus dedicated museums discusses the delicate relationship between museums as trusted, non-partisan, institutions and peace-building aims that often require taking a stance. The section ends

with a brief interview with David Fleming, Director of National Museums Liverpool, discussing the work of the International Slavery Museum. Two chapters in this section, one by Elaine Heumann Gurian on museums as safe public spaces for strangers to encounter one another, and the other by Jasper Visser about the use of ICTs to monitor conflict are suggestive but do not quite go far enough in their analysis of how their proposals might apply to heritage with all of its particularities.

The second section “Heritage and Peacebuilding in Practice” also opens and closes with ‘conversation’ pieces with practitioners. The opener by Sultan Somjee discusses the origins of, achievements, and challenges faced by Kenya’s Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation. His account of how community peace museums were created by pastoralist groups, accompanied by training and networking activities is inspiring and responds to the volume’s aim to ‘solutionise’ heritage. The two following chapters on initiatives in the Balkans focus on the creation of the Balkan Museum Network and programmes building leadership in the field and the role of women therein. The subsequent piece is an important contribution by Bernadette Lynch proposing ways in which museums can helpfully ‘disturb the peace’. Doing this, she argues, involves moving away from the safe terrain of conflict avoidance and breaking down the insulation created by Authorised Heritage Discourse in museums and heritage sites that do deal with emotionally charged material (Smith 2011). Lynch ends with a call for museums not to avoid the messiness and conflict of contemporary life and to become agents of change. The following chapter is an account by Timothy Gachanga of how Kenya’s peace culture, that is to say its indigenous heritage of conflict transformation practices and associated symbols and material culture, has been neglected despite its significance due to traditional religion and practices being dismissed by colonialists and missionaries. He cites compelling examples of how traditional peace heritage has been

successfully employed. Feras Hammami and Daniel Laven co-author the next chapter adopting a critical heritage perspective to analyse heritage *from* peace in the Palestinian-Israeli context. They apply their analytic lens to two heritage sites on opposite sides of the West Bank barrier to uncover the histories and geographies of non-violence in the region. They show how these two cases have much in common, offering safe and multi-layered plural spaces that enable the inherited tropes of the conflict to be considered in a less essentializing light. Will Glendinging ends the section with a reflection of his work in Northern Ireland. His account of how ‘ethical storytelling’ about past conflict was used by Diversity Challenge in a project aimed at reflecting the interactions between former members, and their families, of police units for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland along the Irish border is compelling both as a tool for dialogue and for collecting oral history.

The final section, ‘Heritage, Peacebuilding and Sites’, sees a focus on the immovable and tangible manifestations of heritage. The opener is a conversation with Yongtanit Pimonsathean briefly recounting how local communities in Thailand have been using heritage values to gain leverage in negotiations with central government. The following chapter by Elena Monicelli presents the practice developed by the Peace School Foundation of Monte Sole drawing on the dramatic WWII history of the region in didactic peacebuilding workshops. A piece by Lotte Hughes on her field of expertise, identity and memory in contemporary Kenya, provides a keen analysis of the uses of Mau Mau heritage and its divisiveness citing the Lari Memorial Peace Museum as an example of an initiative to address it. Alon Gelbman follows with a proposal regarding using geopolitical borders for peace tourism that presents illustrative examples of three such types of sites. A thoughtful chapter by Lejla Hadzic and Jonathan Eaton on regional restoration camps in the Western Balkans explores these projects as a means of undoing

the damage done by the wartime polarisation of communities along ethnic and religious lines. By bringing young people from the region together to train and collaborate in rebuilding and restoring heritage sites the project has clear immediate positive effects; the authors however, call for more research on the longer-term peacebuilding effects of such participation. The next piece, by Bosse Lagerqvist, departs from many others in that it addresses social conflict engendered through industrial decline and proposes a framework for using heritage as a resource in transforming former industrial-production based economies. Arguing for a shift in the heritage valuation focus to one relating to use and usability he outlines a model for mapping the heritage needs of stakeholders. The final contribution to the volume is a short, cautiously optimistic, conversation with Saleem Ali reflecting on how his considerable experience of tackling conflicts around environmental challenges can inform heritage peacebuilding work.

Several threads run throughout the chapters in this volume, of which the most recurrent is the potential for museums and heritage sites to become ‘safe spaces’. Several authors (e.g. Lynch and Monicelli) argue for heritage to be a means to confront our contemporary selves and address the conflict, violence, and inequality that persist.

Another interesting line of argument that emerges through a number of the chapters is to do with how museums in particular can approach peacebuilding work without falling into the traps of ‘humanitarian kindness’ and a new form of colonialism (Lynch p. 109-126), they point to the ineffectiveness of simply displaying past wrongs and *evil* perpetrators of the past (Monicelli, 165-178), and indicate how ‘heritagizing’ the past can actually undermine its peacebuilding potential (Hughes 177-188).

All three of the chapters on initiatives in the Balkans relate to activities of the Swedish based NGO Heritage Without Borders<sup>1</sup>. While this speaks well of the legacy of the NGO's work in the region, it is something that could have benefited from some reflection, in the introduction at least. What does it say about the nature of heritage and peacebuilding work that a foreign NGO became such an influential actor in the region? The editors set out at the start that the publication seeks in part to show the potential and contributions of bottom-up approaches and community-based heritage initiatives. What makes the case of Heritage Without Borders quite so unique is precisely how they managed the balancing act between top-down and bottom-up, foreign versus local, centre versus periphery. Yet this aspect is not directly addressed; as they stand the three chapters contribute interesting examples of different types of initiatives – a museum network, a woman's international leadership programme, and regional restoration camps. As the authors of the latter piece suggest, we are left without a clear sense of what their impact might be on the wider community or in the longer term.

Overall what comes through from the experiences collected in this volume is a message both critical and hopeful, that museums and heritage-based initiatives *can* contribute to peacebuilding but that this does not happen automatically or easily but requires the experience and know-how of a skilled midwife. It also requires facing rather than skirting anger, conflicts of perspectives as well as a reflective practice on the part of museum and heritage managers to decide what they want their relationship with the public to be. As such, the volume will appeal to practitioners, policy makers, and researchers interested in examples of museum and heritage practice for peacebuilding aims. For practitioners it offers not only rich examples but thoughtful reflections from key people in the field on

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<sup>1</sup> The headquarters in Sweden has recently been diminished to the point of barely existing while the 'field offices' have flourished.

what has worked, or not, sketching out an image of good practice. For policy makers it is a reality check of often ideologically informed utopian visions of heritage as inherently peacebuilding in its nature at the same time as it indicates what approaches *do* lead to positive, peacebuilding, outcomes. And for researchers it offers an array of case studies, practical examples and proposals to draw on in order to further develop the theoretical dimensions and thus build up a critical heritage approach to the relationship between heritage and peacebuilding.

Since the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented peacebuilding as actions aimed at avoiding a return to conflict, in his 1992 “An Agenda for Peace”, the concept has been progressively developed into a broad strategy. In a 2012 Secretary-General report on the topic three priority directions for peacebuilding were identified: inclusivity, institution-building and, sustained international support and mutual accountability. (A/67/499-S/2012/746, pp. 11-18) These are seen as essential to restoring the social contract, preventing relapse into violence and generally producing societies that are more resilient to inevitable pressures. The transformative aims of these peacebuilding measures are about equitable delivery of social services, accountability, building up a country’s legitimacy, and include creating inclusive space for as wide a set of actors as possible. How can heritage, as a peace imperative, deliver on these declared aims of peacebuilding?

There are some excellent chapters in this volume that tackle thorny issues of the heritage peacebuilding relationship without falling into easy rhetoric; combined with the voices from the practical terrain as conveyed in the conversations pieces, the volume offers a broad spectrum of means engagement of museum and heritage actors with peacebuilding aims. Its greatest strength is the variety of expertise represented, these include

museum curators, academics, and activists but also a business psychologist, an exhibition designer, an architect, an environmental planner and consultants in innovative training, participation design as well as persons leading NGO work. With such a large number of diverse, often short, contributions it would have been helpful to have a unifying reflection pulling out key elements from the collected experiences and the contribution that the editors see these making to further developing the potential and understanding the limitations for museums, heritage institutions, and community-based heritage initiatives, to be instrumental in delivering the peacebuilding needs of inclusivity, institution-building, sustained international support, and mutual accountability. Several chapters address one or several of these peacebuilding aims more and less directly. A clear vision pulling them all together however, would have made the volume's contribution towards advancing work in the deeply knotty terrain of heritage and peacebuilding more explicit, and would have made it an indispensable tool for developing strategies by which heritage can become instrumental in delivering peacebuilding aims. As it stands this volume can serve as a valuable reference of the variety of approaches to meeting these aims and as a catalogue of reflections and experiences from key actors in the field.

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